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1999 Hillview Gardens Borneo

DXpedition *condensed from an article by Bob Schenck, N200/9M600/V8500*

"Hey, Jani! You wanna go on a DXpedition?" "OK," was the response from my old buddy, YB0US.

Hmmm, let's see, Mike, N6MZ, had told me he wanted to go to Layang-Layang to do some diving (both scuba diving and pileup diving!). "Hey, Mike! Wanna go to Spratly with us?" "OK," was the response from Mike—and so on....

Well, now you get an idea of just how a DXpedition is born! It isn't all that mystical! Before I knew it, we had a total of 9 operators involved in a multi-hop DXpedition that I decided to call the "1999 Hillview Gardens Borneo DXpedition" since our "base of operations" would be the Hillview Gardens Resort—9M6AAC in Sabah, East Malaysia. We would start off at Hillview, where we would put together all the hardware for a 1-week stay on Layang-Layang Island in the Spratlies operating as 9M600. Next, we would move over to Brunei where we would attend the SEANET Convention before moving over to a friend's home for a 3-day operation as V8500. Finally, we would wrap up with a Multi-Single entry in the CQWW-CW from the Hillview Gardens ARC station, 9M6AAC.

The Story

Hillview Gardens Resort is a neat little secret hideaway for Ham Radio in Borneo. It was built by my old friend, Alfons Undan, 9M6MU, back in 1997.



9M600 team at the Layang-Layang sign post! N4PN, N6MZ, YB0US, N2WB, N200, N4XP.

When we arrived at Hillview, we were treated to quite a surprise! 9M6AAC was originally set up in one of the resort's motel style rooms back in 1997. Without so much as a hint, Alfons and his XYL, Doris, 9W6DU, were busy building a brand new ham shack just for our arrival! The new shack is at least three times the size of the old one. Jani worked all week prior to our arrival, setting up all the gear and re-running all the coax feedlines!

On November 8th, I was asked to dedicate the new shack, declaring it "open" at a special ribbon cutting ceremony attended by our team, as well as a group of local 9M6 Hams. It was quite an honor! A special plaque was permanently hung at the entrance marking the dedication!

Our first job the next day was to bring down an A3W WARC beam from atop the big 85-ft. tower at Hillview, replacing it with a new CD402 40 meter beam. We would use the A3W on Layang-Layang. In between the antenna work, we took a swim in the Hillview pool and participated in a number of other "Hillview rituals"

which included making concrete tile palm prints for the Hillview "wall of fame," the planting of trees by each team member, and finally, participating in the TAIPAI ritual of sharing a pot of special homemade rice wine. I was allowed to adopt a tree already grown since my presence at Hillview goes back over 20 years. Another ceremony! Ah, they do make you feel special at Hillview!

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Extra Help

Jim, VK6RU—Silent Key

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N2OO dedicates the new ham shack at the Hillview Gardens A.R.C., 9M6AAC, on Nov. 8, 1999, with Brendyn, Doris (9W6DU) and Alfons (9M6MU) observing.

Spratly

After three nights at Hillview, we packed and prepared for our flight to Layang-Layang which took about 1 hour and 15 minutes.

When we arrived at the resort on Layang-Layang, we asked if we could use the resort's conference room for our operation. We were quickly obliged and all of our gear was moved there. The heat was scorching but the conference room was air-conditioned and large enough that we were able to build all the antennas inside in comfort. Everyone went to work and we decided not to go on the air until everything was up and functional. The teamwork was fabulous and by around 5 p.m. we were up and ready to go. Because Jani had worked so hard to make the DXpedition happen, we gave him the honor of making the first QSO. We operated as 9M6OO for the next 7 days, exceeding our goal of 20,000 QSOs.

SEANET and V8500

Our next adventure was the 27th Annual SEANET Convention being held in Brunei. SEANET, the South East Asia Network, is a daily, controlled radio network set up by licensed amateur radio

operators to enable contacts; exchanges of information; and passage of urgent, emergency, or medical traffic within the region.

When we landed at Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei, Hassan, V85HG, was at the airport to greet us. He whisked us all off to the convention hotel in chartered buses and, once checked in, we were escorted to a local restaurant for dinner. After returning to the hotel, we visited the SEANET Convention special event station, V8SEA, and promptly logged some QSOs, as if we hadn't had enough yet!

Everyone was issued a special SEANET Convention shirt and we got a chance to do some shopping in town and see a little of Brunei.

We also visited Bill, V85AA, who had agreed to let us operate from his house after the convention was over. We brought my IC706MKII, along with some accessories, and had a nice visit with Bill and his lovely XYL, Lita, before heading back to the hotel to get ready for the reception/hospitality suite that evening.

Saturday at the convention was a very busy day! After breakfast, the

convention participants traveled downtown in 4 buses to where a professional group photograph was taken in front of a beautiful mosque. Then we were off to see the entrance to the Sultan's palace; the largest residential palace in the world with over 1,400 rooms! Can you imagine that? After much more sightseeing and reaffirming an old friendship with Alan, ZL1TX, we returned to the buses to get ready for the Gala Banquet that evening.

The "Gala Banquet!" Wow! What can I say? We were just getting comfortable at our table before the banquet began when Hassan asked if I would be willing to represent the USA on the reception line being set up to welcome the Prince! The Sultan of Brunei was out of the country, so the Sultan's brother, His Royal Highness Prince Haji Sufri Bolkiah, the Deputy Sultan, was to be the honored guest! You knew something big was going to happen when a crew arrived to roll a very long red carpet through the hotel lobby. Then, several "security" people arrived and positioned themselves around the lobby. I was standing on the reception line along with one Ham from each of 14 other countries represented at the convention. Meanwhile, Jim, K8MR, was whisked up to the V8SEA ham shack on the 7th floor to prepare a demonstration of Ham Radio for the Prince. Finally, after a short wait, a car arrived and several more security people fanned out around the lobby before the Prince came to greet us. One by one, we were each introduced to the Prince by Hassan. The Prince then proceeded to the elevator where he went to see the ham shack on the 7th floor. After a short demonstration by Jim, he returned to the waiting crowd in the banquet room on the 2nd floor where a formal opening ceremony was held.

Throughout the evening, we were entertained by a wonderful cultural group of musicians and dancers. The food was nothing short of fabulous, with a huge buffet of local dishes! After dinner, each country's delegation went on the stage to give a presentation, usually a short speech and then a "sing-a-long" song representative of their country. This being my first SEANET Convention, I was unaware

of the "ritual" of singing a song! Ohhhh no! Me, sing? Now, that would not be a pleasant experience. Maybe if I had known, we could have sung a chorus of "She'll Be Coming Around The Mountain" or something but NEVER without at least a little preparation! So, after explaining that we had no talent—except CW—I gave a short impromptu speech with my two person delegation, N4PN and K8MR, in tow.

After the Prince left, the partying continued until the wee hours of the morning. Bear in mind that all this "happiness" was happening without the aid of alcohol! You see, Brunei does not allow alcohol except for a strict minimum amount that a tourist is allowed to bring in with him. Consumption is restricted to the hotel rooms.

After breakfast on Sunday, it was time to bid old and new friends farewell. Most were heading for home, although there was a modest contingent who followed Alfons and Doris over to Hillview Gardens for a few days. Jani decided to go to Hillview to help put the ham shack back together since we had borrowed some of the Hillview gear for our Spratly operation.

I went to operate from my old friend Bill Maddox's home for 3 days. I was honored to have my old "vintage" V8500 license renewed! V85 calls are not issued any more as the local telekoms now only issue V8xxx licenses (i.e., V8USA—no more #5 in the calls). For the next 3 days, we proceeded to put on a predominantly CW operation from Brunei as V8500, hitting the WARC bands pretty hard. We ended up making about 6,000 QSOs. On Wednesday, after some emotional good-byes, we (N2OO, N4PN, and K8MR) left Brunei for our return to Hillview.

Contest time

It was time to prepare for the CQWW-CW Contest from 9M6AAC. We started to plan our strategy but first we paused for our Thanksgiving Day celebration! What's right! Thursday was Thanksgiving Day! Alfons and Doris even provided us with a traditional turkey dinner, Malaysian style of course! After Paul, N4PN, said the blessings, we all chowed

down! I've never had a Thanksgiving dinner before with turkey and satay! The turkey was baked in a pit under charcoal and the stuffing was made with carrots and ginger! It was all uniquely wonderful!

On Thanksgiving evening, I decided to check out 20 meters before hitting the sack. After calling CQ for awhile, I was surprised to find the band wide open to the northeast USA but only a handful of people were calling. It was a little strange because the few who did call were quite strong! I asked one of the callers to call my XYL Beth (KF2BQ) who was at her parent's house in New Jersey, and ask her to get on the air!

After a short wait, Beth called! She was about S8. Not bad! We spent a few minutes catching up, but then I started to hear a few impatient stations calling over her. I asked everyone to please standby, explaining that it was Thanksgiving and I wanted to talk with "the lady who allows me to go on these trips once in awhile!" I further declared, "You should all thank her!" With that, I stood by and listened to one of the most amazing things I have ever heard in all my DXpeditioning

years! A pileup of "Thank you's" from all over the world. Hundreds of them! And Beth could hear them all as well. It was an unrehearsed, spontaneous moment that we will never forget! Thanks, guys!

During the contest we logged around 4,800 QSOs—not a record, but a respectable entry, indeed.

Following the contest, Peter, G4MJS, and Stephen, G4SHF, remained at Hillview for another day and used their own call, 9M6RIT, to make another 1,000 QSOs. Thus ended a most unusual, successful and rewarding DXpedition. It involved 9 operators, 3 DXCC entities, 5 venues, and resulted in some 35,000 QSOs.

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N2OO greets His Royal Highness Prince Haji Sufri Bolkiah, the Deputy Sultan of Brunei, on the reception line at the 1999 SEANET Convention. (l to r in foreground) N2OO, ZL1TX, 9M6MA, V85HG, and The Prince.

New Life Members.....

WA0ROI

SP5ULD

LU2DAS

KP4UK

SV1RK

Extra Help Provided By.....

JJ8NCZ

W6NIZ

K1XJ

SP5ULD

W1HEO

XE2EED

W7LR

KF2XF

W2TUJ

KC7OPD

JL1RML

W6VTK

WB3DNA

N4UCJ

AE2N

N3NY

W6SL,

and,

SV1RK

Hillview Gardens Borneo DXpedition...conclusion

One of the goals of our DXpedition was to leave an antenna package in Sabah, which would be available for future operations, especially from Layang-Layang Island. With the very generous assistance of the International DX Association and the Southeastern DX Club, we were able to do just that. A set of antennas is now in storage at Hillview Gardens.

I must not neglect to thank INDEXA and our primary sponsors, without whom this DXpedition would not have happened. And a sincere thanks to everyone who worked us. These were some of the most well-mannered pileups I've ever heard! It was indeed a fun and rewarding

experience!

See ya' in the pileups...next time!

1999 Hillview Gardens Borneo Team

DXpedition Leader:

Bob Schenck, N2OO/9M6OO/V85OO

Hardware Engineer:

Jani Kusmulyana, YB0US/9M6US/
V8USA/NM6US

Team Members:

Mike Mraz, N6MZ; Tom Harrell, N4XP,
Paul Newberry, N4PN; William Beyer,
N2WB; Jim Stahl, K8MR; Peter Bowyer,
G4MJS; Stephen Purser, G4SHF

Jim, VK6RU—SK

Neil, VK6NE—QSL Bureau Manager for VK6 and VK9/0—advises us of the passing of Jim, VK6RU. Jim was an INDEXA Director until illness forced his resignation.

It is my sad task to inform you of the passing of Jim Rumble, VK6RU. He became a silent key on the Tuesday before Christmas.

I took over the VK6 Bureau operation from Jim in July 1999 after being told by him that the doctors had advised him of his terminal condition.

Jim will be remembered by many as a top DXer and friend to many around the world.

73, Neil, VK6NE

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